

Living Large

Discussion Questions

1. Does the video define middle class? What definition did your class agree on for this term? Does your definition fit with the information provided in the video?
2. What were the occupations of the boaters at the lake? Are these jobs typically held by rich people or middle-class people?
3. By interviewing “big boys with their expensive toys” is Drew Carey suggesting that all middle-class people spend their money on fancy cars, boats, and jet-skis? What point is he making?
4. What are some different kinds of things that we associate with a comfortable middle-class lifestyle? Make a list. (Examples: cable TV, family vacations, etc.)
5. Is the video trying to show that everyone in America is doing well? What misconception is the program intended to correct?
6. How does the economist Michael Cox compare the cost of various goods and services over the past several decades? Why doesn't he use money as the basis of comparison?

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Discussion Questions – *continued*

7. Cost comparisons over time may understate how much better off we are today because improvements in quality are not taken into account. Explain. (Example: Michael Douglas' cell phone of the 1980s versus the typical cell phone of today)

8. Many Americans may have a hard time paying all of their bills which might include: cell phone, internet, two car payments, mortgage payment on a 2000 square foot house, etc. Is it fair to say, then, that the middle class is struggling?

9. Why do many people seem to believe that the middle class in America is being squeezed?

10. How accurately do people compare past and present conditions? How could nostalgia for the past affect the comparison?

11. Would you rather be a rich person living in the year 1900 or a middle-class person in America today? Explain.

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Think Outside the Box

1. Find at least three different definitions of middle class. Compare the definitions and select the one you think is best. If internet or print resources are not available, create your own definition. Be prepared to explain your choice to the class.
2. Make a list of goods and services the typical middle-class American family can afford today that were either not available at all in 1970 or only available to the rich.
3. Imagine that a full time worker is given the option of receiving a 20% raise or receiving Fridays off with no reduction in pay. Do you think everyone would make the same choice? Which choice do you think would be most popular? Make a list of factors that might lead a person to make each of the choices.

Living Large First Impressions

1. How would you distinguish between middle-class, rich, and poor in America?

2. Do you think the middle class is struggling today? Why/why not?

3. Are middle-class Americans today better off or worse off than when your parents were growing up?

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Enrichment Activities

I. Essay: Explain the following quote from the video: "It's not the high cost of living, but the cost of living high."

II. Interview:

- A. Ask your parents when they or their families got their first computer, VCR, microwave, and cell phone.
- B. Ask your grandparents when they first got air-conditioning, a dishwasher, and a color TV.
- C. Ask them to compare the quality and affordability of these products today with the first models they owned.
- D. As a class, discuss your findings.

III. Research: *Time Well Spent, the Declining Real Cost of Living in America* (pp 4-24)
<http://dallasfed.org/fed/annual/1999p/ar97.pdf>. This report is from 1999. Test its accuracy using the following method: Select five of the items discussed in *Time Well Spent* which your family has purchased in the past year. Determine what price was paid for each item. Then, using a parent's hourly wage or the current U.S. median hourly wage, calculate the number of hours of labor it took to earn enough money to purchase each item. How do your findings compare to the figures presented in the report?

IV. Small Group Discussion: The telephone, computer, car, etc. were all once extremely expensive relative to the average household income when they were first introduced. As such, only the rich were able to afford them and it is therefore the rich who paid for the initial development of these items until production became more efficient and prices dropped. Today, nearly all families have most of these items. What are some products that are currently only affordable to the wealthy but are likely to experience significant price reductions in the future as the market matures? What are some products/services that are not yet being developed or are in the early stages of development, but that you expect to follow a similar pattern in the future once in production?

For a list of additional resources to use with this video, go to www.izzit.org/products and click on *The Drew Carey Project* video.